

Stroke Facts

A stroke occurs when a blood vessel that carries oxygen and nutrients to the brain bursts or is blocked by a clot. When a stroke happens, part of the brain cannot get the blood and oxygen it needs, so it starts to die.

A transient ischemic attack (TIA) is sometimes called a mini-stroke. A TIA always lasts less than 24 hours and generally does not cause permanent brain damage. However, it is a serious warning sign of stroke and should not be ignored.

Symptoms of a Stroke or TIA

- Sudden numbness or weakness of face, arm, hand, or leg (especially on one side of the body)
- Sudden vision impairment (cannot see out of one or both eyes)
- Sudden trouble walking
- Sudden confusion (or cannot understand what someone is saying)
- Sudden trouble speaking
- Sudden dizziness or loss of balance
- Extreme headache with no known cause



How to Recognize a Stroke or TIA

If you are with someone and he or she starts having **difficulty with speech** (most commonly slurring of words), **motor impairment**, **loss of sensation/movement on one side** of the body, **abrupt cognitive difficulties**, **sudden loss or blurring of vision**, or **unexplainable loss of emotional control**, then the person may be experiencing a stroke.

Checking for Stroke Symptoms

If you think someone you know is having a stroke, take the following steps, using the “**Think FAST**” approach:

- Face:** Ask the person to smile. (Does one side of the face droop?)
- Arms:** Ask the person to raise both arms. (Does one arm not go up? Does it drift downward?)
- Speech:** Ask the person to repeat a simple sentence, such as “The sky is blue.” (Are the words slurred? Can he or she repeat the sentence correctly?)
- Time:** Call 911 immediately if the person has trouble with any of these tasks. Time is critical. (The faster the medical response time, the less damage will be done.)

Diagnosis of a Stroke

A doctor will use various tests and gather information in order to make a diagnosis. The doctor will most likely take a medical history, do a physical and neurological examination, have certain laboratory (blood) tests done, perform a CAT scan of the patient, and order other diagnostic tests that may be needed.

Risk Factors for Stroke

The more risk factors you have, the greater your chance of having a stroke.

Uncontrollable Risk Factors:

- Age (the older you are, the greater your risk)
- Race (African Americans are twice as likely to have a stroke as are whites.)
- Family history of stroke (Some families have a higher-than-normal genetic risk of stroke.)

Controllable Risk Factors:

- High blood pressure
- Cigarette smoking
- High blood cholesterol

Other Conditions that Increase Risk:

- Obesity
- Heart disease
- Diabetes

Reducing the Risk for Stroke

- Eat a healthy diet.
- Exercise.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- If you smoke – stop smoking.
- See your doctor regularly.
- Get regular blood pressure and cholesterol checks.
- If you are diabetic, manage your blood sugar levels.
- Take medications according to directions.
- Maintain a healthy body weight.

Alarming Information about Strokes in the United States

Each year, approximately 700,000 people suffer a new or recurrent stroke in the United States. Stroke is the third leading cause of death for adults and the number one cause of adult disability. Women account for about six in ten stroke deaths. Eighty percent of strokes are preventable, according to estimates.

References

American Heart Association (www.americanheart.org)
 American Stroke Association (www.strokeassociation.org)
 National Stroke Association (www.stroke.org)

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